

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 5610

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TAGS: PDIP, PGOV, DR, US
SUB: BALAGUER'S WASHINGTON VISIT A LOCAL TRIUMPH

SUMMARY: PRESIDENT BALAGUER'S WASHINGTON VISIT AND BILATERAL TALK WITH PRESIDENT CARTER ARE VIEWED IN SANTO DOMINGO AS A MAJOR PERSONAL TRIUMPH AND AN IMPORTANT EVENT IN U.S.-DOMINICAN RELATIONS. BALAGUER'S IDENTIFICATION WITH THE PRESIDENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS, HIS STATURE AS A STATESMAN AMONG HEMISPHERIC CHIEFS OF STATE, HIS CONTINUED VIGOR DESPITE EYESIGHT PROBLEMS AND HIS DEFENSE OF DOMINICAN ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN WASHINGTON ALL CONTRIBUTED TO HIS SUCCESS. EVEN THE OPPOSITION ALLOWED BALAGUER HIS TRIUMPH WHILE TAKING HEART IN PRESIDENT CARTER'S EXPECTATION OF FREE ELECTIONS IN THE DR. PRESIDENT BALAGUER'S PRESS CONFERENCE REMARKS IN WASHINGTON ARE BEING TAKEN TO MEAN THAT HE WILL SEEK RE-ELECTION. END SUMMARY.

1. THE WASHINGTON VISIT OF PRESIDENT JOAQUIN BALAGUER, SEPTEMBER 7-9, TO ATTEND THE SIGNING OF THE PANAMA CANAL TREATY HAS BEEN WIDELY HAILED IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AS A PERSONAL AND NATIONAL TRIUMPH. BALAGUER WAS WELCOMED HOME AS A NATIONAL HERO BY A CROWD OF THOUSANDS WHICH LINED THE ROUTE FROM SAN ISIDRO AIR BASE TO HIS RESIDENCE AND BY A CHORUS OF PRAISE NOT ONLY FROM HIS OWN SUPPORTERS BUT FROM THE NATIONAL MEDIA AND MOST SECTORS OF RESPONSIBLE
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PUBLIC OPINION AS WELL.

2. SEVERAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTED TO FAVORABLE LOCAL REACTION TO BALAGUER'S VISIT. FIRST, THE DOMINICAN PRESIDENT SUCCEEDED IN IDENTIFYING HIMSELF PERSONALLY WITH PRESIDENT CARTER AND WITH U.S. POLICIES ON HUMAN RIGHTS. THE PRESIDENT'S WORDS OF PRAISE AND HIS OBVIOUS RESPECT FOR BALAGUER WERE

VIEWS HERE AS SIGNIFICANT WITH ONLY A HANDFUL OF OPPOSITION POLITICIANS DISMISSING THEM AS THE REQUIREMENTS OF PROTOCOL. SECOND, BALAGUER IN WASHINGTON STOOD AS AN EQUAL AMONG HEMISPHERIC LEADERS, COMPARING FAVORABLY WITH MANY OF THEM AND CONTRASTING SHARPLY WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF REPRESSIVE GOVERNMENTS LIKE ARGENTINA AND CHILE. THIRD, THIS WAS BALAGUER'S FIRST VISIT TO WASHINGTON IN HIS ELEVEN YEARS AS PRESIDENT, HIS SECOND MAJOR FOREIGN VISIT (HE ATTENDED THE PUNTA DEL ESTE CONFERENCE), AND ONE OF THE FEW TIMES HE HAS LEFT THE COUNTRY SINCE BECOMING PRESIDENT. THE OCCASION PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY FOR BALAGUER, WHO JUST TURNED 70, TO DEFY THOSE OF HIS OPPONENTS WHO CLAIM THAT HIS EYESIGHT PROBLEMS DO NOT PERMIT HIM TO CONTINUE GOVERNING. FOURTH, BALAGUER PROJECTED A NATIONALISTIC IMAGE IN HIS DEFENSE OF DOMINICAN ECONOMIC INTERESTS BY SEEKING FAVORABLE TREATMENT BY THE U.S. ON THE ISSUE OF SUGAR.

3. BALAGUER'S REFORMIST PARTY MACHINERY LOST NO TIME IN CAPITALIZING ON THE TRIUMPH, CONDUCTING A SATURATION MEDIA CAMPAIGN INCLUDING RADIO, TV AND NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENTS, LEAFLET DROPS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM AIRCRAFT-MOUNTED LOUD SPEAKERS. THOUSANDS OF DOMINICANS WERE BROUGHT TO THE CAPITAL IN BUSES TO WELCOME THE PRESIDENT HOME. FEW DOMINICAN LEADERS ATTEMPTED TO DENY BALAGUER THIS VICTORY. THE OPPOSITION, PARTICULARLY LEADERS OF THE DOMINICAN REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (PRD), AGREED THAT BALAGUER HAD ACQUITTED

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HIMSELF WELL AND FOCUSED ON THE STATEMENTS OF ASSURANCE BY PRESIDENT CARTER THAT THE 1978 NATIONAL ELECTIONS WOULD BE "A MODEL" FOR THE HEMISPHERE. THEY INTERPRETED THIS DECLARATION OF CONFIDENCE AS A NOT-SO-SUBTLE BUT VERY EFFECTIVE FURTHER COMMITMENT OF BALAGUER TO FREE ELECTIONS.

4. ALTHOUGH BALAGUER SUCCEEDED IN WASHINGTON IN PRESENTING HIMSELF AS A STATESMAN AND NOT JUST A POLITICIAN FACING AN ELECTORAL CONTEST, DOMINICANS WERE QUICK TO DRAW DOMESTIC POLITICAL INFERENCES FROM THE TRIP. BALAGUER'S STATEMENT IN SEPARATE PRESS INTERVIEWS THAT HE COULD DEFEAT THE OPPOSITION DIVIDED OR UNITED IF HE CHOSE TO RUN, WAS INTERPRETED BY MANY AS A STRONG INDICATION OF BALAGUER'S INTENTION TO GO FOR A FOURTH TERM IN OFFICE. SOME SAW THE VISIT AS AN ELEMENT FAVORING BALAGUER'S CANDIDACY. A COMMENT HEARD IN SEVERAL OF THE WEEK-END TV TALK SHOWS WAS THAT THE SUCCESS OF BALAGUER'S MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT HAD UNDERCUT THE CLAIM OF THE OPPOSITION PRD THAT THEY HAD SPECIAL LINKS TO "LIBERALS" IN WASHINGTON

AND THAT THE NEW AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION'S POLICIES FAVORED THE ELECTION OF THEIR CANDIDATE IN 1978. ONE MEASURE OF THE SUCCESS OF THE VISIT AS A

DOMINICAN NATIONAL RATHER THAN STRICTLY PARTISAN EVENT, HOWEVER, WAS THE UNIVERSALLY NEGATIVE REACTION TO THE PICKETING IN WASHINGTON BY MINOR OPPOSITION GROUPS: THE PICKETS WERE SEEN AS INAPPROPRIATE AND IN BAD TASTE.

5. COMMENT: DOMINICANS TEND TO SEE THE WORLD FROM THEIR INSULAR PERSPECTIVE AND UNDERSTANDABLY HAVE EXAGGERATED THE INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF BALAGUER'S VISIT. HOWEVER, THE VISIT WAS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THEM AND TO US. IT RANKS AS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE INITIATIVES IN U.S./DOMINICAN RELATIONS TAKEN BY THE USG IN RECENT YEARS. PARTICULARLY AUSPICIOUS FOR DOMINICANS AND FOR OURSELVES WAS THE FINE BALANCE ACHIEVED IN THE PRESIDENTIAL BILATERAL BETWEEN WELL-DESERVED PRAISE FOR BALAGUER'S ACHIEVEMENTS AND THE

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U.S. INTEREST IN A FREE ELECTORAL PROCESS. THIS BALANCE ALLOWED BOTH BALAGUER AND HIS OPPONENTS TO DRAW INSPIRATION FROM THE ENCOUNTER WITHOUT ANY SUGGESTION OF EXCESSIVE USG INTERFERENCE IN DOMINICAN INTERNAL AFFAIRS, AND IT DID IN FACT STRENGTHEN THE COMMITMENT TO FREE ELECTIONS IN 1978.

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